

# **EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

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## **U.S. AMBASSADOR JAMES F. MORIARTY OPENING REMARKS FOR AMERICA WEEK 2009 BARISAL, JANUARY 26**

Good evening. Thank you very much Mayor Hiron and members of the Barisal community. I am delighted to be here today to launch America Week in Barisal.

In years past, the U.S. Embassy has held America Weeks in other cities of Bangladesh, from Rajshahi in the North to Chittagong in the South. America Week gives Bangladeshis in Barisal a chance to meet Americans, to understand how the U.S. has worked with Bangladesh for decades. At the same time America Week provides the U.S. Embassy a chance to understand better the people of Barisal, both their concerns and their hopes. This is my first visit to Barisal and the first time we have held an America Week in your city.

In many ways, it is fitting that America Week occur in Barisal this year. This is a year of great opportunities and great challenges in both Bangladesh and the United States – and Barisal is an example of those challenges and opportunities.

Today, I would like to talk about the transitions that both Bangladesh and the United States are undergoing. About the changes those transitions will bring, but also about the continuity of purpose both our countries must display. The newly-elected governments of both countries have come to power, promising change and a better future for their people. That means new policies, to strengthen our democracies, to improve our economies, and to better provide for the safety and welfare of our peoples.

Both newly-elected leaders must confront the global economic crisis while trying to improve the lives of peoples. As a great U.S. President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, said, “Democratic government has the innate capacity to protect its people against disasters once considered inevitable, to solve problems once considered unsolvable.” Now, more than ever, it is critical that our two great democracies, the United States and Bangladesh, work together to confront these common threats and achieve our common objectives of a freer, safer, and more prosperous world.

While pursuing change, however, both governments must keep their basic, long-term commitments to their peoples: to protect democracy, to develop the country, and to provide security for their citizens.

Change and continuity will also mark the relations between our two countries. The United States welcomes the return of elected government to Bangladesh and looks forward to working with the new government, as equal democracies with shared interests. At the same time, much of this cooperation will build on a strong base. Ties between our two countries are flourishing.

The United States has provided Bangladesh more than 5 billion dollars of assistance since Liberation. The United States is Bangladesh's largest market, taking nearly 4 billion dollars of exports. The United States is Bangladesh's second largest source of remittances, with the half million Bangladeshis in America sending nearly 2 billion dollars every year. The United States works closely with Bangladesh on issues from climate change to peacekeeping to counter-terrorism.

The United States Government and its development partners have also worked hard with the people of Barisal for decades. The U.S. has helped the people of this division build roads, electrify villages, and reduce the impact of floods and cyclones. This week we want to showcase these ongoing activities and identify areas where we hope to work together in the future

Americans and Bangladeshis spoke clearly when they cast their ballots in historic elections last year. In the United States, last week we inaugurated our first African-American president at a time when my country faces tough economic challenges – and has troops fighting overseas to protect our values. In Bangladesh, the people restored democracy in the most peaceful, free, and fair election in this country's history. But these two elections are not the end. They are the beginning of a new era.

On election night, President Barack Obama promised he would work for all Americans—including those who had voted for his rival. Similarly, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina pledged to reach out to the opposition to build a healthier democracy. A successful democratic transition, however, depends on the cooperation of all Bangladeshis, not just those at the top. In Bangladesh, as in America, everyone has an

important role to play in building a strong democracy and a healthy economy. There is a role for those elected to government or opposition positions, and also one for civil society, the private sector, the media, and each individual citizen. Bangladeshi citizens demonstrated their deep love of democracy by coming out to vote peacefully and in record numbers. Now they have both the privilege and responsibility, as do the citizens of all democracies, to hold their new government accountable.

In the days following the election, former President Bush and Secretary of State Rice phoned the Prime Minister to convey their congratulations to her and the people of Bangladesh. Similarly, I would like to congratulate all the voters of Bangladesh, particularly the young and first-time voters who played a major role in shaping the democratic transition here.

Bangladesh can be proud. The smooth transition from the Caretaker Government to a democratically-elected government is an important first step on the path to a vibrant democracy. Bangladesh's elections should serve as a model for the future both here and in other countries around the world. Just as in the United States, however, Bangladesh should nurture and strengthen its democracy. We hope the new government will continue reforms begun by the Caretaker Government to improve governance and to lay the foundation for a corruption-free nation. As they cast their ballots on December 29, the people of Bangladesh clearly voiced their support for reform.

The global economic crisis creates challenges for both countries as well. Economic uncertainty and risk demand the attention of strong leaders working together to resolve the crisis. Barisal showed its resiliency following the devastation of Cyclone Sidr last year. I am pleased to be here now to see the progress you have made. I will also look at the effectiveness of programs the United States has initiated to help rebuild the lives of those who suffered.

Immediately after Cyclone Sidr, the United States provided \$30 million in emergency food assistance and \$6.5 million for other emergency relief activities. I have heard countless stories of Bangladeshis and Americans working side-by-side during the relief phase to help the people of Barisal and southern Bangladesh.

At the time of the cyclone, the message of the U.S. Government to the people of Barisal Division was a simple one: We were here before the cyclone; we were here

during the initial emergency relief phase; and we would remain to help Barisal, and Bangladesh, recover. I am proud to say that we have kept this promise to the people of Barisal Division.

In 2008, the U.S. Congress approved \$100 million to help the people of Bangladesh recover from Cyclone Sidr. This money will be used for emergency relief, rehabilitation, and sustainable development in poor and vulnerable villages in the char, haor, and Cyclone Sidr-affected regions. The United States recently signed an agreement with Bangladesh to build 24 multi-purpose cyclone shelters and four bridges in the cyclone affected areas of Khulna and Barisal divisions. We will provide \$4.3 million for these shelters and bridges. In an emergency, each shelter can safely protect 1,500 people; the shelters will serve as schools during normal times. More shelters and improved bridges will safeguard both people and their livelihoods from the effects of future disasters.

I believe these efforts will not only allow the people of Barisal to recover from Cyclone Sidr, but also aid in the region's economic transition. I am certain Barisal has a bright future, full of hope and new beginnings.

And the United States will continue to be a friend to the Barisal region and to all of Bangladesh. Welcome to America Week.

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*\*As prepared for delivery*